

URBANIZATION AND THE NIGERIAN URBAN HOUSING CHALLENGE

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Abstract

One of the most assertive and growing global phenomena of our contemporary times is the explosive growth of cities and metropolitan agglomerations, varying in pace, size and effects from the developed to the developing nations and across their respective constituent nations. The implications on urban housing in the face of frightening national population growth rate and the resultant worsening deficit in housing stock are evident and of growing magnitude and complexity. In view of the centrality of housing to sustainable development, this paper succinctly discusses urbanization in terms of its perspectives, growth factors and problems in relation to urban housing. Lamenting the dearth of requisite data in the country, it outlines policy and planning initiatives to cope With the dynamic urbanization and housing challenges of contemporary Nigeria to avoid urban chaos and the colossal cost of remedying it.

Introduction

The growth of towns and the influx to them of large numbers of people from other areas including those of a rural character is a global trend occasioned by many factors including population growth, economic development and rural-urban migration. The world is rapidly changing from an agricultural and rural society to a highly urbanized one. Studies reveal the swift spreading nature of this phenomenon. Kilmmt (2000) opined that by 2025, two thirds of the world's population (that is, more than 5 billion people) would live in cities. By then, he said, there will be almost 300 cities with population of over a million people and nearly 100 mega-cities with more than 5 million inhabitants. The United Nations' demographic experts also predicted that by 2025 AD, 50 percent of Africans as against the present 33 percent will be resident in urban areas. This dramatic change-over from a world of rural people to one of city-dwellers, according to Arayela and Falaye (2000), will present a whole range of problems and considerable implications on the housing situation.

In developing countries, Sada (1973) revealed that urbanization is taking place at a low level of economic development and much more rapidly than in industrial nations in the hey-day of their urban growth. While urbanization in the developed countries was closely associated with industrialization and economic development, in developing countries, it is associated with economic, social and administrative problems. Nigeria is ranked high among the most rapidly urbanizing countries of Africa and thus shares in these problems of developing nations.

Lewin (1981) opined that in Nigeria, there were 56 centres (that is, places with population above 20,000) in 1953 with a total urban population of 3.20 million. In 1963, within a period of ten years, the number of urban centres had increased by over 228 percent with the emergence of 185 urban centres with an urban population of 10.75 million. The rate of formation of new urban centres and growth of existing ones have continued unabated.

It is estimated that the major cities of the country are growing at a much faster rate than the national average of 5% for urban areas. Lagos, for instance, is estimated to be growing at a rate between 10% and 15% per annum while cities like Ibadan, Kano and Enugu have growth rate of between 7% to 10% per annum (FGN 1992) as against United Nations Report (1982) that put the annual growth of Seoul at 7.8 %, Mexico 5.5%, Yaunde 8.7% and Baghdad 7.5%.

The consequences of this explosive urban growth are most visible in the rapid deterioration of urban housing resulting in urban poverty especially as there is no proportionate increase in the housing stock. The country's high urbanization figure, Fadamiro and Fadairo (2000) revealed, has several implications for every aspect of the people's socio-economic and cultural lifestyle. The higher the rate of urbanization, the higher the overcrowding, and the greater the deficiencies of the elements of urban design in the cityscape.

Perspectives of Urbanization

A single satisfactory and generally acceptable definition criterion of urbanization is difficult as it varies from region to region. In developed countries, two criteria that generally distinguish the urban element in a country's population are quantitative in terms of minimum population or demography and

qualitative as regards the characteristics of the economy and modes of living. Deriving from this western perspective, an urban centre, Sada (1973) revealed, is supposed to be an industrial, commercial and non-agricultural community. By this, most African settlements with populations over 200,000 but with 40% of the population engaged in agriculture will only pass for mere agrovilles (large agricultural villages).

In Nigeria, Mabogunje (1962) identified cultural factors as relevant in delineating urban centres from rural, citing Yoruba cities in contrast to Igbo settlements. A fourth factor from Nigerian post-Independence experience is the administrative or political factor. By this, political or administrative presence (e.g. Local Government Headquarters) could confer urban status on a place, settlement or community. Thus, urbanization, in Nigerian perspective, can be defined from four views:

- Demographic (Urban being not less than 20,000 population).
- Economic (Urban being not less than 50% agrarian population).
- Cultural (Urban being Society with strong social string e.g. language, religion, custom or historical background).
- Administrative or Political (Urban being administrative presence).

Urban Population Growth Factors

Urban population growth is induced primarily in two ways. Increases in the points of concentration, that is, number of households resident in the place through influx of people via rural-urban and urban-urban migration; will produce a resultant population growth. Secondly, increase in the size of points of concentration through natural biological multiplication will produce population growth in tune with the net difference between birth rate and death rate. The reality is that both take place simultaneously, thus, engendering rapid urban population growth.

Nigeria's Housing Situation

Housing holds an eminent place of singular importance in the general strategy of development for its socio-economic characteristic but it is sad, to note, lamented the Federal Commissioner for works and Housing, (Okunnu, 1973) that not less than 95 % of the national population occupy substandard homes and neighbourhoods. While the population of the city is increasing at an alarming rate, there is no complimentary increase in new dwelling units; he bemoaned. Although housing shortage is a global problem, as no nation has succeeded in housing all of its residents, it is of a record proportion in developing nations and notably critical in Nigeria.

Provision of housing in the country has, to date, lopsidedly tilted towards the private sector, which has produced the greater percentage of existing stock. In historical perspective, housing was a residuary subject vested in Regional Governments until the last three decades of the 20th century sequel to Decree No 1 of 1966. Thereafter, successive Federal and State Governments have demonstrated some measure of commitment towards the provision of housing with varying levels of accomplishments. This public sector intervention had been of different initiatives articulated towards massive housing provision and they include: staff housing schemes, Government Housing Loans, Urban Development and Mortgage Loans, Site and Services, Rent Control, Cooperative Housing Schemes, Housing Corporation, Employers Housing Schemes, National Housing Policy, and National Housing Fund. However, these schemes have not been significantly successful, as a remarkable gap exists between the target and the achievement. Thus, the Federal Government of Nigeria (1991) revealed in its National Housing Policy that housing problem in the country is indeed enormous, complex and at a crisis stage, manifesting qualitatively and quantitatively.

Enuenwosu (1986) projected a yearly construction of 600,000 housing units every year from 1986 to 2000 AD (about 9 million housing units) in order to make for the numerical deficiency in housing stock. Lamentably, not only was the target not met but the deficit has also worsened on account of economic downturn, declined spendable income of citizens, frightening costs of materials and overall building cost. The result is that majority of urban dwellers who belong to the low and medium income groups are still housed in slums on squatter basis within unplanned and unsanitary neighbourhoods that are bereft of liveable conditions. This is underscored by Jagun (1987) that three-quarters of total housing stocks in Nigeria's urban centres are substandard, with close to three million urban households living in slums. These households live in environments prone to diseases, social and even political unrest which might seriously threaten their very existence. Poorly planned or unplanned neighbourhood characterizes the urban centres. Factories, markets, shops, churches, mosques and houses exist side by side with no zoning schemes. Roads are inadequate, sanitation is very poor, electricity, telecommunication facilities and water supply are all inadequate and unreliable.

These, to mention a few, describe vividly the housing conditions and environments of most of the country's urbanscape today. There is an imperative need in the face of the country's frightening urban population growth trend, to examine the factors generating the growth and the dimensions of implications these could have on housing with a view at mitigating their effects.

Urbanization Implication on Housing

Abiodun (1985) posited that housing problems in Nigeria have been accentuated by rapid growth in the urban population. Sequel to national independence, attendant socio-economic and administrative changes brought about rapid urban growth. Rural-urban migration heightened as a result of developments in urban centres serving as pull factors. The emergence of Nigeria as one of the world's leading oil producing nations and the oil boom of the seventies found expression in multidimensional developments like creation of states and local governments, industrial growth and establishment of different levels of institutions of learning, all in favour of urban centres thus cumulating in staggering urban growth across the nation. Added to these is the neglect of rural areas in development schemes resulting in a push factor that forces youths to seek employment or further studies in the urban centres.

The main and obvious pertinent challenges, in general terms, to urban management and planning come in the areas of feeding the vast number, provision of shelter, employment, transportation, social and moral security. Against the concept of sustainable development which has been defined as that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs, these are no mean, challenges. The implications of this growth rate and trend on housing are enormous. These implications are best appreciated when viewed against the comprehensive concept of housing as one transcending the premises of mere shelter and encompassing the whole environment where man lives and works together with the services that support them. The rapid rate of urbanization in Nigeria accounts for the depreciating quality of housing in the country's urban centres.

Overcrowding or House Occupancy Ratio

Galloping growth of urban population without a corresponding increase in housing stock naturally results in overcrowding and high occupancy ratio in the grossly inadequate urban housing stock. This refers to the number of persons per habitable room. Overcrowding here is in two forms namely physical overcrowding (numerical) and psychological overcrowding (comfort level). Overcrowding engenders misuses and abuses of spaces and facilities. It also impinges of the health of occupants as air-borne and respiratory diseases thrive in situations of overcrowding. In most instances, overcrowding increases stress, poor development of sense of individuality, sexual conflict, and lack of adequate sleep that contributes to poor work and learning.

In the face of high and unabating demand for rental housing occasioned by urbanization, rental housing also becomes unaffordable to the common man. The result is usually a slum-option with the barest needs of life.

Upsurge of Spontaneous or Shanty Settlements

Attendant on urban population explosion coupled with inadequate number of housing stock and unaffordable rental housing is the responsive spontaneous urban sprawl, which has various spatial and planning implications. These settlements, bereft of basic social and infrastructural facilities, begin to spring up at the sub-urban fringe constituting fringe slum that later becomes a social menace as it is inherent with health hazards and provides hideouts for criminals. Such settlements impose colossal expenditure on government for their redevelopment and planning which can be avoided through provision of adequate housing stock and planning prior to occupation.

Social Amenities

Paucity of social amenities to support the population and the livability of available housing stock normally results following influx of people to the urban areas. In virtually all of the existing urban areas of the country, the level of basic amenities is grossly inadequate. These include: water, electricity, roads, market, fire service, recreation facilities, cemeteries, abattoirs, schools and health services to mention a few. All these are essential components of a livable environment needed for dignified life.

Environmental Degradation

The absence or inadequacy of services to support urban population explosion find direct expression in environmental pollution and degradation the result of which is inimical to health.

Refuse Generation and Disposal

Perhaps a greater menace to urban environment in Nigeria and one that has increased in magnitude in recent times is the problem of refuse generation and disposal as several large urban centres across the nation lack efficient waste disposal systems.

High incidence of Building Maintenance and Facilities

Explosion in urban population inevitably constitutes an over-load for spaces, finishes and facilities. Wear and tear assumes a higher incidence. Akingbohunge (2002) described it as a natural phenomenon that varies with number of users and intensity of use. It is a significant index for maintenance, he asserted.

Fall in Housing Quality

Housing quality falls with increased population. Houses are designed with target population and as soon as the target population is exceeded the housing quality declines.

Modernization of Urban Structures

A very positive implication of urbanization is the obvious need for modernization of urban core structures in step with present and predicted future needs. All traditional urban centres have an indigenous core characterized by a homogenous cultural group usually resistant to change. Old mud houses, ill-ventilated houses lacking in modern sanitary equipment, narrow roads and unsanitary environment according to Sada (1973) will need modernization. Although this will require enormous financial outlay, the emerging development will justify the colossal investment.

Recommendations And Conclusion

At no time in human history have men shown such strong inclination to agglomerate in large numbers and in increasing number of centres as in recent times. The evident fast pace, the great size and the complexity of the concomitant problems of this phenomenon require a careful prediction and framing of solutions in order to generate modern urban towns with attractive, healthful and liveable housing environment.

Experiences throughout the world, (Adedeji, 1973), indicate that a post-factor administrative response to urbanization problems will not provide satisfactory solutions. What is needed is advance planning—an anticipation of the problems, how they will develop and the steps which are necessary to deal with them.

Available evidences reveal galloping number of people adopting urban way of life, thus, pointing to a frightening stance of the already high rate of urbanization particularly in the third world countries including Nigeria with characteristically low economic and technological capabilities. The reality of the urbanization problem compels a two-fold approach. Planning to deal comprehensively with the immediate situation in the urban centres and additionally to plan adequately with realistic prediction, for future situation.

A radical resources development in step with the enormity of these challenges is essential. Tenacious attempts and drive to improve the urban centres must be complemented with corresponding development of the rural centres to even out migration chances in the two directions. This will generate a realist stance capable of producing stable housing quality in the urban landscape.

For effective arrest of urbanization challenges, the dearth of reliable data in the country will need a clinical attention. It will require human, financial and policy resources with efficient coordination.

Provision of adequate housing in consonance with scientifically determined pace of urbanization would help in stabilizing housing quality and adequacy. Building cost, which is, in part, a product of material prices has remained an insurmountable obstacle in the country's drive to provide adequate number of housing stock. To arrest the nagging problem, government will need to take the bull by the horns by closing its borders to exotic building materials while research centres and industries are repositioned to massively produce local building materials at affordable costs for housing provision. Complimentary advertisement by way of patronage of the materials should be adopted by all government agencies to encourage individuals to follow suit. Building loans through cooperative societies and government institutions should be well funded to help people to own houses of their own.

All urban centres and prospective ones should be provided with base maps and planned out for possible occupation before they are turned into urban fringe. This presupposes that the cost of land will

be heavily subsidized by government so that they will not go out of the reach of the targeted class of residents. Any unplanned area should get government attention as soon as settlers are noticed in them. The cost of doing all these may not compare to that of redeployment if they are allowed to grow into slums.

Population control is inevitable for sustainable development just the same way as control of natural resources is inevitable in view of posterity. Every effort must be made by government and promptly too, to intervene in the situation of the already degraded urban sprawls across the nation. The people and the land a country has, are its greatest assets.

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